

"THE MILLS OF THE GODS."

A Naturalistic Story of Mistaken Identity and Retributive Justice.

In a small city not many miles distant from Charleston, there lived about twenty years ago a well-to-do farmer, whose family consisted of himself, his wife, and little daughter, a girl not far past the age of ten years. She was a bright and attractive little one, the pride of her doting father and the joy of her affectionate mother.

In the farmer's employ was a white young man some seventeen or eighteen years of age, who was known familiarly as George. He was a typical Southern poor white, with a lantern jaw, a toe head and a most ungainly and ungraceful walk. Intellectually he was a misfit, and he gravitated to his proper place as a pebble when dropped into a brook, find its way to the bottom. Nature made George a server and his innate intuition compelled him to recognize the fact that there was a social and intellectual rubicon beyond which he could not cross. And so he looked after the mules, fed the stock, planted the grain and helped to reap the harvest. The only difference between George and his associate brutes on the farm was that he could talk and think in a crude sort of way while they could not, so far as we know.

There was another young man in the same locality whose name also was George. He was half-witted and harmless and possessed an inordinate love for tobacco; he ate it as one would eat bread, or apples, and seemed never so happy as when he had his pockets and his mouth stuffed with the, to him, precious weed. Who ever spoke to George had to give him a chew. Those who knew him best always responded to his appeal for "baccy." "Baccy" seemed to be the only word in his vocabulary. Like Poe's Raven, that word "was his only stock in store." This George was black. Everybody knew him in the town and no one in their sober moments would believe him capable of doing harm, even to a fly. His mind seemed to be a blank. He did not notice things going on around him, if he did, he did not show it. The only thing that could arouse him from his lethargic state was the sight of two or three men talking—when his countenance would light up and he would approach them and extend his brawny black hand and utter his one word "baccy." His appealing tone and his sad face usually excited pity and procured for him the one thing that gave him happiness, "baccy."

One evening about dusk, when birds and fowls seek rest and repose in quiet nooks, and high places, there passed down the road on an errand the little daughter of the farmer of whom we have already spoken. All unconscious of danger she sang merrily the songs familiar to children of her age, and her little heart seemed full of the joy born of innocence and confidence in human kind. She had not proceeded more than a quarter of a mile when upon reaching the bend of the road, where a stately live oak spread its lofty branches, a man whom she instantly recognized sprang from a place of concealment, seized her and throwing her into a clump of bushes ravished her.

After accomplishing his diabolical purpose he left her and returning to the farm house, retired to "sleep the sleep of the just."

The little maiden recovering from her excitement and fright, abandoned her journey and going back home, sought her mother, and between sobs, told her story. "It was George, mama, who did it," said the little one. "I recognized him as soon as he left his hiding place."

The farmer—her father—coming home late that night, was apprised of the assault upon his little one, and of course was furious. The demon of murder entered into his heart, and he resolved to hunt down and kill the scoundrel. He aroused his neighbors who, on hearing the story, entered fully into the plans. They were only too

glad to assist in lynching another "nigger." They set out, led by the father, and the party was subsequently reinforced by George (who had rested sufficiently), armed with a Winchester and breathing words of vengeance against the "nigger."

The colored people of the town (be it said to their credit) hearing and learning the purpose of this uprising, came to the defense of the half-witted black boy, and threatened to do things if the whites attempted to lynch him.

This show of strength and loyalty intimidated the small band of the "superior race," and muttering a few imprecations and threats, they gave up the hunt until the next day. In the meantime, the colored people had passed the word along, and every male of fighting age reported for duty the following morning, on the main street of the town, "jes to see justice don."

Presently George was seen among his people, having eluded his old father, who had tried to conceal him in his cabin until the excitement had blown over, but George wanted some "baccy." He walked over to where the white men stood talking and gesticulating, and approached to within ten feet of the farmer, extended his hand and said "baccy." Quick as a flash, the farmer raised his Winchester and fired, breaking George's arm below the elbow. This act aroused the blacks and they made a rush for the whites, with guns, and axes and antiquated muskets, but did no other damage than to maim and wound some of the white men.

The shooting brought the sheriff and a posse to the spot, who quickly disbanded the mob and on the complaint of the farmer and his boy, George, arrested the wounded young Negro and hauled him to the county jail.

Thither the Negroes of the town repaired in great numbers, vowing that he should never be lynched, that they wanted justice, and meant to have it, or they would lay the town in ashes that night. This threat had a good effect. The whites went their way, but the negroes stood guard all night at the jail, to make assurance doubly sure.

The following day the only surgeon in the town was sent for by the sheriff and some of the negroes to come to the jail, and set the arm of this boy who was to have a speedy trial because of the guilt of his offence. He refused point blank to leave his office, saying "the black brute ought to bleed to death."

The people of his race then staunchly the flow of blood, and in rude fashion set the arm as best they could and thus in some slight measure retarded the pain of the helpless victim of a wicked and misguided mob.

No time was lost to set the wheels of justice (?) in motion, the mob wanted to hang this "nigger" by law (?) since it was not permitted to hang him without it and it clamored for his blood.

The evidence of his guilt was manifest, the injured girl had recognized him at the moment the assault upon her had been made. Nothing was clearer than that, the "nigger" was guilty and every white man in court was morally certain that he didn't have a leg to stand upon, legally.

The judge himself was not devoid of bias against the prisoner. His look seemed to say, "I know you niggers too well, this nigger is guilty; convict him quickly; I'm anxious to pass sentence."

Although there were but three witnesses to this particular crime, God, the real criminal, and his victim. There were at least a dozen to testify as to the vicious character of the black boy, and to their own belief, based on a variety of things, of his guilt.

Had not the victim herself repeatedly averred on the stand, when asked the direct question, "was it George who assaulted you?" That it was George? The prosecutor's face was a study, he had, without trying made out a case against the "nigger" at the "bah," and just to show how complete and with

what consummate skill he had woven the web around the prisoner, he would put him on the stand, not to testify, but to be identified. The accusing finger of this victim of lust, should point him out.

So the prosecutor ordered the bailiff to bring the prisoner around. As he was being led to the bar, there was a suppressed murmur throughout the dingy old court room.

"Order in court!" cried out the bailiff. "Stand up, George!" shouted the prosecutor, with a confident air—but George was thinking about "baccy" and either did not hear or did not regard the peremptory order. The court attendant seized the young Negro by his good arm, swung him around and marched him to the front of the rail, where he was roughly commanded to stand up, although the poor devil was already standing up. His honor arose from his seat and glaring viciously at the now terrified Negro before him, called the little maid to the stand again. He wanted some of the glory out of the case, so he relieved the prosecuting attorney of his duty by examining the witness himself. "My little dear," said he, "you said when you testified a little while ago that it was George who assaulted you."

"Yes, sir, I did."

"Do you see George in the court?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Just point him out, where is he?" The child raised her hand and walking to the left of the District Attorney, pointed her index finger at the white George who sat on a bench with a number of other persons who had testified against the "nigger." "There he is, sir." "Are you sure that is the man?" now asked the District Attorney. "Yes, sir," she answered promptly, and with some warmth of feeling, for one of her age. "It wasn't the black George at all; it was George over there. You know it was you, George," she said reproachfully. And George's color changed perceptibly, and he became restless in his seat. The child fixed her gaze upon him and he averted her eyes. But all eyes in that dingy old court room were focused upon him. Continuing, the innocent child said: "I bit him on his right arm and that's what made him let me go. Then he swore at me and ran away, he did. I don't like him, any more, he is naughty."

The audience, the judge and prosecuting attorney were dumbfounded—were not only surprised, but disappointed at the turn affairs had taken. They had not looked for this, and they were not quite prepared even to believe this straightforward story.

The court officers kept their eyes on George, the farmer boy, however, until an information had been sworn out by the father of his victim for criminal assault. This done they put their hands on him, and gave him black George's place. He was made to remove his coat and roll up his shirt sleeve, and there on his right arm just below the muscle was the tell-tale print of the girl's teeth.

The evidence was so conclusive, the prisoner was remanded, and in less than two weeks he was convicted and sentenced to eighteen years at hard labor.

Black George was released from custody without a word of comment or apology. As he passed on his way out of the court room his good arm was extended many times to receive liberal contributions of his favorite weed.

The strange (?) denouement created a sensation which lasted for months. Such a crime was unusual (?) among white men. The brutality of it incensed the populace, and if George had not been white he would surely have been lynched or hung. His youth was in his favor and the hope was expressed that he would be a better man after this experience—poor George.

One dark night three weeks after the occurrence here related the doctor who had refused to set the broken arm of the innocent Negro boy, George, was called suddenly to attend a dying patient some four miles distant from his office.

The lowering clouds presaged a storm, and the roar of the artillery of heaven almost shook the earth. He got into his buggy and proceeded on

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